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HEADLINE: Baltimore senator's arrest spurs her peers to seek probe of police

BYLINE: Margie Hyslop; THE WASHINGTON TIMES

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ANNAPOLIS - A Baltimore senator's arrest moved colleagues yesterday to call for Maryland's attorney general to investigate whether a Baltimore police officer used excessive force.

Sen. Joan Carter Conway claims the officer handcuffed her hands behind her back and forced her to the pavement by kicking her feet from under her during the incident Tuesday night.

"All of a sudden they focused on me," said Miss Conway, who said she was in a crowd drawn to an accident by the screams of a 6-year-old child who had been struck by a car.

The officer charged Miss Conway with hindering an investigation after she did not move away as the officer instructed, police said.

Nineteen lawmakers - including House Speaker Casper Taylor - sent a letter to Attorney General J. Joseph Curran asking him to conduct an inquiry.

Miss Conway, a Democrat, was among several people whom officers asked to move while paramedics and firefighters tended to the child, who had been struck by a car about 7 p.m. outside Miss Conway's tax office.

Baltimore police Col. Robert F. Smith said Miss Conway was warned she would be arrested if she did not move. A police report quoted her as telling officers: "Arrest me then."

Col. Smith said Miss Conway tried to pull away from the officers numerous times as they walked her away from the scene, and to keep control of her, they forced her to sit down. Col. Smith said the officers were not aware of who Miss Conway was.

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Miss Conway said she was standing across the gurney from the paramedic and not keeping anyone from the injured child, whose condition she was still inquiring about yesterday.

She said she did not identify herself as a senator, although she said some in the crowd asked why the police were acting as they were toward "Senator Conway."

A spokesman for Mr. Curran said the office could not consider investigating the incident until it was sure it had authority.

Some of the lawmakers calling for the investigation said the reason for the police behavior was not her action, but her race.

"It is clear that this is a case of excessive and unwarranted police aggression on an unarmed African-American woman," said Delegate Salima Siler Marriott, a Democrat who is chairman of Baltimore's House delegation.

Their outrage over the incident brought Baltimore Mayor Kurt Schmoke to the state capital, where he spent 30 minutes conferring with Miss Conway and Baltimore legislators in the office of Sen. Barbara Hoffman, Baltimore Democrat.

After the meeting, Mr. Schmoke said the police internal affairs division was investigating the incident.

"The delegation is very concerned about this and similar incidents that seem to involve excessive use of force for minor infractions," Mr. Schmoke said in an interview after the meeting.

* This article is based in part on wire service reports.

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